



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 15, 2013

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First 5 LA Allocates \$1.5 Million to Expand Free Vision Care Services for Children

First 5 LA, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help children under the age of 5 live physically and emotionally healthy lives so they are ready to learn, allocated \$1.5 million to ensure that the county's neediest children receive free vision care services.

Acting on a motion by First 5 LA Commission Chair Mark Ridley-Thomas, the commission voted to expand their existing partnership with UCLA to facilitate a children's vision care program and establish new partnerships with two leading nonprofit organizations that provide vision care services to children: Vision to Learn and the Junior Blind of America.

"This momentous decision ensures that children across Los Angeles County will receive vision care services that otherwise may not be afforded to them," said Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chairman Mark Ridley-Thomas. "Equipping students with glasses to reach their full potential will not only help students perform optimally in the classroom; it is a significant tool to help them excel in life."

The motion designates \$1.2 million over four years to Vision to Learn and \$300,000 over two years to Junior Blind of America. The funding is projected to serve at least 50,000 additional children over the next four years. The motion comes on the heels of the 15th Anniversary of the passage of Proposition 10, which was approved by California voters in 1998 and allocates funding for early childhood health and development programs for pregnant women and young children up to five years of age.

Vision to Learn delivers optical care to low income communities through a unique partnership with Los Angeles Unified School District by providing two mobile eye clinics on site. After an initial screening from LAUSD nurses, children are served in the mobile clinic by trained opticians and optometrists who offer free eyes exams and deliver free prescription glasses to students. Since 2012, this innovative mobile clinic has provided more than 12,500 children with free vision care.

"This support from First 5 LA will help better the lives of 12,000 kids, giving them a chance to succeed in school and in life." said Austin Beutner, Founder and Chairman of Vision To Learn. He added, "Vision To Learn solves the problem of access to eye care and glasses in low income communities through Los Angeles by bringing the services directly to the kids at school."

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Vision Health Initiative, vision disorders are the most prevalent disabling condition among children. Moreover, it is estimated that one out of every four children between the ages of 5 and 17 has a vision disorder that is often undiagnosed because the child has never received a comprehensive eye examination from an eye doctor.

The Junior Blind of America Vision Screening Program shares Vision to Learn's successful track record in providing comprehensive screenings to preschool children throughout LA County since 2008.

"Thanks to this generous support from First 5 LA, Junior Blind will be able to provide thousands of low-income children with vision screening services," says Dr. Jonathan Macy, longtime Junior Blind Board Member and ophthalmologist. "Together, Junior Blind and First 5 LA will help ensure healthier vision for some of our counties' most vulnerable and underserved children."

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